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To: Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
From: Curt Witynski, Assistant Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Date: January 20, 2010
Re: AB 546, Requiring Meeting Notices and Minutes to be posted on Municipal Websites

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities opposes AB 546, mandating that all cities and villages with Web sites post their meeting notices and minutes on the site. While local governments strongly support providing citizens the fullest and most complete information regarding the affairs of government, and many communities have chosen to post meeting notices and minutes on their Web sites, we believe this is strictly a local policy decision. Local officials are in the best position to balance the cost and use of staff resources against the benefits of providing additional public notice.

It is important to bear in mind that most cities and villages in Wisconsin have populations under 2,500. The median sized municipality is approximately 1,400 in population. There is wide variation regarding the sophistication of municipal Web sites. Many small communities have marginal Web sites that are updated only infrequently whenever the clerk's workload allows him or her to get to it.

We have other questions and concerns about the bill:

- ◆ How long do the agendas and minutes need to be posted there?
- ◆ How soon after a meeting must the minutes be posted?
- ◆ As written, the bill not only applies to city council and village board meetings, but requires the posting meeting notices and minutes for all municipal governmental bodies, including park boards, library boards, zoning boards of appeal, plan commissions, and any other municipal board or commission.

We urge you to vote against recommending passage of AB 546. Thanks for considering our comments and concerns.



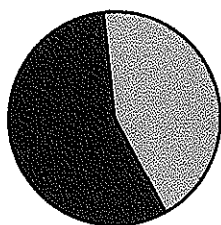
WISCONSIN
NEWSPAPER
ASSOCIATION

Who Has Ever Viewed A Government Website?

- ⇒ **FACT: More than half of the U.S. population has NEVER viewed a local, state or federal government website!**

Of the 44% who viewed a government website, the data may not account for Internet users who visit because they work for a government agency or otherwise are required to do so for work.

Who Views A Local, State or Federal Government Website?



■ 56% of the U.S. Adult Population Has Never Viewed A Govt. Website

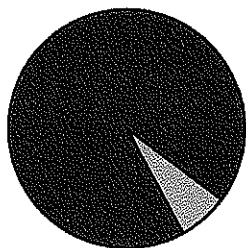
■ 44% of the U.S. Adult Population Has Viewed A Govt. Website

- ✓ **It is more likely...**that someone will access information about their government through the newspaper, their local and trusted source for information.
- ✓ **Why? Because...**more than a quarter of the U.S. Adult population is NOT even on the Internet. But 83% of adults read a community newspaper every week, according to the National Newspaper Association.

- ⇒ **FACT: Fewer than 10% of the U.S. population views a local, state or federal government website daily!**

Those 7% of visitors may visit a government website once a year for leaf collection schedules or information on polling sites. But there is no indication that they are looking for public notices.

Who Views A Local, State or Federal Government Website On A Daily Basis?



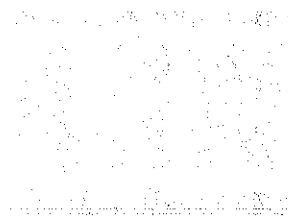
■ 93% of the U.S. Adult Population Did Not View A Govt. Website Yesterday

■ 7% of the U.S. Adult Population Viewed A Govt. Website Yesterday

- ✓ **It is more likely...**that someone will access information on a daily basis by browsing a newspaper at home over coffee, at the local library or on the bus to work.
- ✓ **Why? Because...**newspapers are in the business of building audiences, and notices in them are more likely to be noticed.

*Data compiled from U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of Resident Population, Released May 2009, see <<http://www.census.gov>> & Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, May 2008, see <<http://www.pewinternet.org>>

For more information contact Peter Fox, executive director, Wisconsin Newspaper Association
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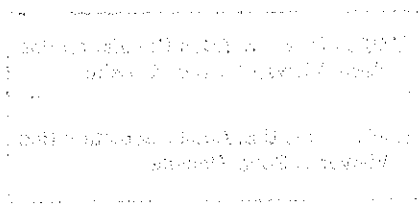


What the Survey Revealed About the U.S. Population

FACT: More than half of the U.S. population was under 25 years of age.

The survey revealed that the U.S. population was heavily skewed toward younger age groups. In fact, more than half of the population was under the age of 25.

The survey also revealed that the U.S. population was heavily skewed toward younger age groups.



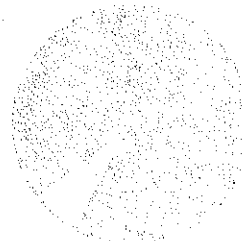
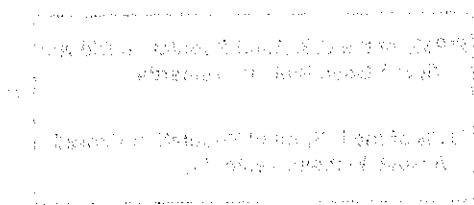
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FACT: Fewer than 10% of the U.S. population viewed a career as a federal government job.

Those who did view a career as a federal government job were heavily skewed toward younger age groups. In fact, more than half of the population was under the age of 25.

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18 January, 2010

**Testimony in support of Assembly Bill 546/Senate Bill 276
Assembly Committee on Urban and Local Affairs
Submitted by Bruce King, Governmental Affairs Director
REALTORS® Association of Northwestern Wisconsin**

Madam chair, and members of the committee, my name is Bruce King, and I am the Governmental Affairs Director for the REALTORS® Association of Northwestern Wisconsin, based in Eau Claire. I appreciate the committee scheduling this public hearing, and welcome the opportunity to provide you with the background and intent of this piece of legislation.

The origin of this came when Senator Pat Kreitlow and I were colleagues at WEAU TV in Eau Claire back in the mid 90's. The Internet was in its earliest days, and we were looking at local governments to provide more information as to their operations, budgets, etc. At the time, only a handful of governmental bodies had developed a website, and even fewer had meeting agendas, minutes, budgets and the like posted.

Jump ahead to today. Our association is the largest in Wisconsin in term of area. In our membership region, we monitor over 270 units of government, from county, to city, to village, to towns and townships. Even today, especially in more rural areas, very few municipalities have their own website, and many that do in our area, still do not post their information, and yet others have sites, and do not keep them updated.

I approached Senator Kreitlow shortly after he was elected to the 23rd Senate seat that represents much of my trade area, and together we sketched out a piece of legislation that would serve as the first step in bringing information that every citizen has a right to know, but in an electronic format. My mother served as township clerk for the Buffalo County town of Maxville for over 20 years, so I have seen first-hand how legal posting requirements are managed. This bill does not change that, nor does it diminish where legal notices are posted, nor does it remove from the municipalities designated newspaper, the requirement of posting to that publication. The intent of this bill is for local units of government that have a website and who currently do not post agendas and minutes to do so, including school districts. As more municipalities gain a site, they can then post their activities online.

This legislation does not direct, nor does it ask a local unit of government to expend dollars to build a site, that is not the intent. The intent is to looking toward the future. As rural broadband is developed and more and more of the public choose to receive their information via cell phones, Blackberries and iPhones, the dissemination of this information needs to be in an electronic format in addition to traditional newspaper ads and postings on the town or village hall.

Given the state of the state's financial situation, which extends to every unit of government, this bill was written to be as "revenue neutral" as feasible. Again, the intent is not for governmental bodies to expend dollars to build a site, it simply requires those units of government that have websites to use them and keep them current.

Some would argue that this bill is just another mandate. My argument is that every citizen of the State of Wisconsin has a right to know what their elected officials are doing, be it in the capitol, the county board, or the local town hall. Technology dictates, and demographics will demand, that the information

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currently posted on the wall of the town or village hall needs to also be available in an electronic format. More and more we see an erosion of traditional radio and television in favor of "news on the go" capabilities that today's cellular technology provides.

This bill sets the groundwork to do just that; provide electronic postings of meetings and minutes to keep all citizens engaged and informed.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for their service to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin and for consideration of this bill.

X

Bruce King
Governmental Affairs Director